

## NEW FICTION

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### VARIED FORMS

CHINESE NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS: STORIES OF OLD CHINA. Edited by Brian Brown. Brentanos.

THE Chinese Minister to the United States, the Right Honorable Sao-Ke Alfred Sze, remarks in a prefatory note to this volume that it is "quite noticeable that the American public is taking a deeper interest in Chinese literature now than they ever did before." The English versions of Chinese poems recently put out by Miss Amy Lowell were well received, and no doubt have stimulated an already existing interest. Mr. Brown aims to make this selection of old Chinese folk tales, and of some modern imitations, a sort of parallel prose offering, to supplement the several specimen volumes of Chinese poetry. The book holds a great deal of interesting material, wholly new to English readers, but the method of presenting it is, perhaps, open to some criticism. "Though I have changed the structure of many of the tales, materially," Mr. Brown explains, "the rewriting was always done with the assistance of some Chinese friends and the original sense of the tales preserved in every case." But there is, often, a too obvious admixture of Western modifications, and one feels that it would have been better to give the tale in an exact, unqualified translation.

By far the most interesting are those which seem to show no alien influences; such as some of the very ancient animal and magic stories, of the fox who assumes human shape, for example, and, at the other extreme those of pure fancy like the beautiful story of the "Flower Nymphs." Mr. Sze points out that in "days of old, novels and short stories had no recognized place in Chinese literature. The old literati never aspired to be story tellers. Time has changed and now the book stores in China are literally flooded with stories." But this modern imitative work has but slight interest; it is, indeed, a poor mixture, like the cups made by the Chinese for export trade, which lose the beauty of their prototypes in the attempt to conform to Western usage—clumsy handles added to a delicate piece that should have no handle.

But the genuine folk tales are of great value. They seem to conform, with curious closeness, to the folk tales of the Aryan races, though with a more graceful, more delicate fancy, as in the story of the "Thunder God," wherein the human hero is transported into a cloudland and helps the gods to pour out the showers upon his own village. It is noticeable that most of them, even the oldest, are definitely moralized, like Aesop's fables, though the original basic legend is clearly discernible. The stories also hold a great deal of information upon old Chinese customs and beliefs.

YELLOW BUTTERFLIES. By Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews. Charles Scribner's Sons.

THE seasonal small volume by Mrs. Andrews has become a hardy perennial. It is admirably adapted for use as a gift book; handsomely printed and dainty in form, and it differs from the usual thing in that it has sound literary values, of the gently pathetic, mildly sentimental school. Its emotion is genuine enough, if somewhat conventional both in manner and subject matter. Mrs. Andrews has a very large audience, and this tale will, no doubt, really "bring comfort to thousands whose sons fell in the war." It centers upon the "Unknown Soldier" and the burial at Arlington, and shows how a bereaved mother found consolation and received a "sign"—the butterfly being a symbol of immortality. It is told with all of Mrs. Andrews's practiced skill.

THE CHESSMEN OF MARS. By Edgar Rice Burroughs. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.

MR. BURROUGHS has outdone himself in this continuation of his Martian romances; not so much in the lurid exuberance of fantastic conceptions as in a certain sinister quality of imagination, which, sometimes, has power to make you forget the extravagance of it

and to bring about a real shudder. Here and there his visions progress from the mildly amusing or grotesque fantasia and become the nightmares of the drug addict—nightmares that occasionally hold a fetid content. The attack upon the wandering princess by the animated but headless "rykor" (a beautiful human body without a brain or even a head) is too realistic to be palatable. The idea is not only repulsive but may even be labeled as tainted. But there is a subtlety in the whole conception and a skill in working it out that raise it above any of his previous achievements as a bizarre piece of artistry.

For the most part, however, the story is the usual Burroughs yarn, marked by great facility of invention, strenuous enough to make the ordinary "tank drama" seem tame, and excellently worked out as

a plot. The Princess Tara is blown away in her small flier in a cyclonic storm and falls among strange people in "Bantoom," where the rulers are simply heads, pure intellectuals who make use of the headless "rykors" when they need a human body, hitching themselves on at the neck. Of course there is a rescuing prince chasing after her and they escape from this infernal country only to drop into a worse mess. It involves plenty of fighting, plotting, some love making and a remarkable game of "chess" played by living pieces, a game wherein the moves involve a combat to the death between each of the opposing pieces. Amateurs of the lurid will not be disappointed in it, and it must be admitted to be rather the best thing he has done, although it holds some poisonous content.

## The Rise of the One Act Play

CONTEMPORARY ONE ACT PLAYS OF 1921—AMERICAN. Edited by Frank Shay. Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Company. CAROLINA FOLK-PLAYS. Edited by Frederick H. Koch. Henry Holt & Co. REPRESENTATIVE ONE ACT PLAYS BY CONTINENTAL AUTHORS. Selected by Montrose J. Moses. Little, Brown & Co. A TREASURY OF PLAYS FOR WOMEN. Edited by Frank Shay. Little, Brown & Co.

KING ARTHUR'S SOCKS AND OTHER VILLAGE PLAYS. By Floyd Dell. Alfred A. Knopf.

SOCIETY NOTES. By Duffy R. West. Stewart Kidd Company.

SCRAMBLED EGGS. By Lawton Mackall and Francis R. Bellamy. Stewart Kidd Company.

LITHUANIA. By Rupert Brooke. Stewart Kidd Company.

SOUNDING BRASS. By Edward Hale Bierstadt. Stewart Kidd Company.

THE STICKUP. By Pierre Loving. Stewart Kidd Company.

A FAN AND TWO CANDLESTICKS. By Mary MacMillan. Stewart Kidd Company.

ALTHOUGH the one act play is among the most recent of literary innovations, yet it has already shown a vitality and a tenacity of life that place it among the accepted forms of art. In the short period of its existence, it has been responsible for a surprisingly large amount of good work; in many cases it has been invaluable in dealing with situations of genuine dramatic intensity, yet too narrow in scope to permit of a full length play; and not infrequently it has proved adequate to embody themes that otherwise might have had to be extended to three or even five acts. The chief handicap of the one act play, in America at least, is that for the most part it has had no theater; often it has been used as a mere "filler" for longer productions, and its salvation has been in the rise of the little or art theaters. These theaters, which cater to limited audiences in some of the larger cities of the country, ordinarily rely on very simple or suggestive stage settings as designed by Gordon Craig or others of the modernists; they usually present three or four one act plays in an evening, and strive primarily for the artistic production of serious drama.

And how high has been the standard fostered by these theaters will be apparent to any one who makes a comprehensive study of the contemporary one act play. Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, George Middleton, Percival Wilde and Theodore Dreiser are but a few of the names of those who have rendered notable contributions in America alone; and the list in England is an extended and imposing one. For one who desires an introduction to what is being done in the one act drama in America and abroad, the group of books under review will prove highly valuable, for therein we find some of the most notable work of some of the best writers of one act plays.

Perhaps the most representative collection—at least, the most representative from an American point of view—is the anthology entitled "Contemporary One Act Plays of 1921." This volume, which contains only plays produced in America in 1921, is distinguished by a striking variety of work, from the charmingly poetic to the bleakly tragic and the deliciously fantastic. Among the poetic plays, "Solomon's Song," by Harry Kemp, deserves most prominent mention; among the satiric, "Napoleon's Barber," by Arthur Caesar, is worthy of notice as a particularly clever piece of work, and "The Hero of Danta Maria," by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman and Ben Hecht, may be pointed out as a striking comedy

that has the drawback of commencing somewhat too slowly. "The Dreamy Kid," by Eugene O'Neill, is another play of especial merit—a piece of work very much in Mr. O'Neill's usual vein, somber and sordid, intensely dramatic with a leaning toward tragedy, vividly realistic and graphically real. As for the remaining selections, the least that can be said is that they differ widely in value; some, such as "Tickless Time," by Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook, appear too trivial and too absurd for inclusion in the collection, while others, such as "Thursday Evening," by Christopher Morley, are interesting and well written, although not particularly significant comedies of domestic life.

"Carolina Folk-Plays," a collection of five short dramas in dialect, is another volume composed exclusively of the works of Americans. In these little plays we are treated to vivid glimpses of the Carolina mountains, of moonshiners and outlaws, of suspected revenue officers and of wretched tenant farmers, of village storekeepers and of a weird backwoods atmosphere of superstition. Typical of the collection is "The Last of the Lowries," by Paul Greene, an impressive but ghoulish play in which we see an old woman mourning the last of her sons, outlawed and shot down one after the other, until in the end she has only their blood stained garments to remember them by. In "Off Nags Head," by Dougald MacMillan, we have the lurid and somewhat melodramatic story of a woman shipwrecked years before, and insanely grieving for her drowned child.

Turning to Montrose J. Moses's "Representative One Act Plays by Continental Authors" we will find a collection containing much excellent work, but work distinctly below the best British and American standard, perhaps because of the loss

attendant upon translation, perhaps because the Europeans have not yet mastered the one act form. The anthology is distinguished, however, by "Countess Miz-zie," Arthur Schnitzler's skillful comedy of the Venetian nobility, by Maeterlinck's well known play, "The Blind," and by the works of authors no less celebrated than Andreyev, Strindberg and Sudermann.

An anthology whose interest might seem to be confined to one sex, yet which is really designed for a masculine as well as a feminine audience, is Frank Shay's "A Treasury of Plays for Women." This book takes its title from the fact that the plays included may be performed exclusively by female actors, and that, accordingly, the love element in most of them is reduced to a minimum. In spite of this limitation, however, the plays are far from uninteresting. There is Edna St. Vincent Millay's excellent poetic drama, "The Lamp and the Bell"; there is "The Lost Pleiad," a poetic play by Jane Dransfield; there are selections by Eugene O'Neill, Maeterlinck and other notable writers; and, by way of bringing down the average of the collection, there are two freakish plays by Alfred Kreymborg.

The remaining books are all the works of individual writers rather than anthologies. "King Arthur's Socks," by Floyd Dell, is a collection of one act plays indicating that the author's forte is not the drama. Some of the plays are conceived whimsically, imaginatively, and with genuine cleverness; but, for the most part, the cleverness seems too consciously sought; there is a certain hollowiness, a certain artificiality of tone, as if the dialogue were made to order rather than created by some inner necessity; frequently the author produces startling scenes or conversations without being able to give any justification for being startling; and frequently it seems as if he had combined an immature Shavianism with a half baked Freudianism, and so armored set out to conquer the world.

Six little pamphlets, each containing a single one act drama, complete the list of plays under review; and in each of these some commendable work is to be found. "Society Notes," by Duffy R. West, is a skillful and convincing satire of the moneyed aristocracy; "Lithuania," by Rupert Brooke, is a stark and vivid tragedy of the peasantry; "Scrambled Eggs," by Lawton Mackall and Francis R. Bellamy, is an amusing satirical comedy in which the characters are chickens and ducks; "Sounding Brass," by Edward Hale Bierstadt, is an effective tragedy of a prison warden's life, and "The Stickup," by Pierre Loving, and "A Fan and Two Candlesticks," by Mary MacMillan, are interesting and fantastic little plays in doggerel.

STANTON A. COBLENTZ.



## NIGGER By Clement Wood

whose article on the negro in our last issue you will recall. He is author also of an earlier novel, "Mountain," besides his volumes of poetry. The New York Herald: "It is a book which is not only of the highest artistic merit but is also of great value as an honest and keenly understanding presentation of part of one of the gravest problems that now confront humanity."—H. L. PANGBORN.

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